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SUBJECT: INDONESIA'S ISLAMIC PARTIES--FADING A BIT AHEAD OF
ELECTIONS

REF: A. JAKARTA 0024

[1](#)B. 08 JAKARTA 2157 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph L. Novak, reasons 1.4 (b+d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Indonesia's Islamic-oriented parties have so far not picked up much traction in the campaign for the April legislative elections. The Prosperous Justice Party (PKS)--which had high expectations--has faded a bit in the polls. Other conservative Muslim parties have also not made much of a dent. In the meantime, a moderate to liberal Muslim party has been ripped apart by a leadership fight. Over all, Muslim parties could pick up momentum down the stretch, but, at this point, they do not seem poised to make a big leap in terms of national importance. END SUMMARY.

KEY ISLAMIC PARTY: NOT MUCH TRACTION

[1](#)2. (C) Indonesia's Islamic-oriented parties seem to be losing momentum in the lead-up to the April national legislative elections. The PKS, a key Muslim party, is fading a bit, for example. After a string of wins in local and regional elections in 2008--including victories in the gubernatorial races in populous West Java and North Sumatra--party leaders boasted that PKS would win 20% or more of the vote in April's elections. Other observers predicted figures lower than that. The party received 7.3% of the vote in 2004. Current polling data, however, from the respected opinion research outfit Lembaga Survey Indonesia (LSI) shows PKS support has dropped to a mere four percent.

[1](#)3. (C) Although the party is known for its careful, steady approach, PKS has made some clear missteps in its attempt to woo voters. PKS, for example, ran a series of controversial television ads in late 2008 featuring a picture of former president Suharto. The ads did not go down well, with observers criticizing the party for trying to honor the disgraced former president. Observers also noted that the PKS--which tries to promote a "clean," anti-corruption image--was now inexplicably linking itself to Suharto and effectively to the web of corruption that surrounded his government.

[1](#)4. (C) In addition, PKS misfired in recent rallies it sponsored in front of the U.S. Embassy. These rallies were meant to mobilize support against the Israeli intervention in Gaza. The Election Commission--citing large PKS banners and other campaign paraphernalia--said the rallies violated laws stipulating that large-scale campaigning may only take place from March 16 to April 5, much closer to the election. To much publicity, police questioned three PKS officials about what occurred, although charges were not filed in the matter.

SMALLER PARTIES PRESS CASE

[1](#)5. (C) Other Muslim parties are also not making much of a dent. The National Mandate Party (PAN), the party of well-known intellectual Amien Rais and led by politician Soetrisno Bachir, is hovering at around three percent in most

polls (it received 6.4% of the vote in 2004). The United Development Party (PPP), which received 8.2 % of the vote in 2004, is also lagging behind, at around three percent.

¶16. (C) While relatively weak on a national scale at least at this point, both parties have pockets of strength in conservative regions. PPP, for example, is strong among Muslims in the four provinces of Indonesian Kalimantan. Pol/C during a recent visit to Banjarmasin, the capital of South Kalimantan, saw many pro-PPP signs and the local governor, a member of the PPP, predicted the party would do well there. PAN is strong in parts of Central Java and also in the Banten region near Jakarta. PAN also has proven links to Muhammadiyah, a mainstream Muslim movement, that it can count on for support. However, regional support may not mean much this election, since all parties must win 2.5% of the national vote to get seats in the DPR. There are also reports that PPP and PAN may support President Yudhoyono in the upcoming presidential election.

MODERATE PARTY: FALLING APART

¶17. (C) In the meantime, the moderate to liberal Muslim National Awakening Party (PKB) has been torn apart by a leadership fight. Led for years by Abdurrahman Wahid (a.k.a., "Gus Dur"), Indonesia's president from 1999-2001, the party picked up 12.6 percent of votes in the 1999 election and 10.6 percent of support in 2004. It is currently polling in the 4-5% range. The party's fortunes have been seriously impacted by intra-party turbulence. In 2008, Muhaiman Iskandar, a relative of Gus Dur's, wrenched control of most of the party from Gus Dur and his daughter Yenny Wahid's group.

¶18. (C) Polling at new lows and in need of allies, Gus Dur's faction is said to be leaning toward supporting the Indonesian Party of Democratic Struggle (PDI-P). Iskandar is said to be close to the Golkar Party and to President Yudhoyono. Despite the intra-party shakeout, both factions can count on tapping into the traditional base of support of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), one of Indonesia's mainstream Muslim movements.

THE STRETCH RUN

¶19. (C) There is still time before the legislative elections and many voters remain undecided. PKS has a strong organization and could do well on election day despite the poll results (its leader, Hidayat Nur Wahid, is also popular and could be a vice-presidential candidate). In addition, it seems possible that events in the Middle East could assist the Muslim parties by giving them issues to mobilize around, although the recent situation in Gaza has not appeared to have added to their strength. At this point, there seems only a limited prospect of Islamic parties netting solid gains in support and thus raising anew the specter of the "Islamization" of Indonesian politics.

¶10. (C) In fact, according to some commentators, parties with an Islamic agenda are expected to gain less than 20% of the vote. One or more of the Muslim parties could disappear after the April elections by not meeting the minimum threshold to hold seats in the DPR.

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